

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of *Disarmament Forum* explores the "hot topic" of uranium weapons. Between calls for a moratorium on uranium weapon use and assurances from national and international sources that these weapons are safe and have valuable military utility, there is both uncertainty and confusion amongst decision makers and the wider public on the scientific and legal debates at hand. What exactly are these weapons and what is their perceived utility? What legal regimes are applicable to their use? What are the known and suspected health and environmental effects? What sort of research needs to be undertaken to have a more complete view of the issues?

The next issue of *Disarmament Forum* will consider small arms issues in West Africa. It will examine small arms transfers and proliferation and analyse some of the activities being undertaken in the region to combat the problem, from government-led initiatives to civil society projects, from technical and legal fixes to peace education. What are the impacts of these programmes? What lessons can be learned for the future? And what are the chances of achieving a real, durable improvement in security for West Africa through small arms control?

On 16 June UNIDIR's conference on Community Security and Operational Effectiveness brought together academics, senior policy-level experts and field practitioners from operational agencies as well as representatives of over thirty-five governments. Participants used experiences from Nepal and Ghana, and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa to demonstrate how a deeper understanding of local cultural realities and security needs of communities can improve project design and increase the effectiveness of field-level operations. The conference was part of UNIDIR's Security Needs Assessment Protocol (SNAP) project. SNAP is working to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian, development and security operations by improving the design of field-level activities that pertain to community security. The objective of the project is to devise a means to assess local security problems as they are understood by community members themselves to assist with programming solutions.

In celebration of the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, UNIDIR organized a seminar on 1 July 2008 in Geneva. The anniversary seminar celebrated the *raison d'être* of the Treaty as well as its achievements from 1968 through to 2008. It also examined the NPT's purpose and achievements as the cornerstone of worldwide nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. After opening remarks from the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Sergei Ordzhonikidze, and from the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Sergio Duarte (by video), Ambassador Dáithí O'Ceallaigh of Ireland, Ambassador Valery Loshchinin of the Russian Federation, Ambassador John Duncan of the United Kingdom and Garold Larson of the United States of America spoke on the NPT yesterday and today. The seminar concluded with presentations from Ambassador Mohamed Shaker, Vice-Chairman, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs and Jozef Goldblat, Resident Senior Fellow at UNIDIR, on the relevance of the NPT.

Audio files for the presentations made at both of these meetings are available for download from UNIDIR's web site, <www.unidir.org>. You can also listen to presentations from the meetings on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education, Information and Communication Technologies and International Security, and Conventional Arms Control and Disarmament. Where possible, audio proceedings of UNIDIR events will be added regularly from now on, so if you are unable to attend our meetings, be sure to check our web site, where you will be able to listen at your leisure.

UNIDIR actively participated in the Biennial Meeting of States (BMS) on implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (14–18 July 2008) at UN headquarters in New York. At the opening session of the BMS, UNIDIR and its project partners (UNDP, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Small Arms Survey) distributed their Draft Report analysing the national reports submitted by states between 2002 and 2008; a more detailed overview of the findings was presented on 17 July at a side event seminar. UNIDIR researcher Kerry Maze spoke at the opening session, examining the issue of how to match needs and resources to ensure improved targeting and coordination of international assistance on SALW issues. The following day, at the side event entitled "Making the PoA Work: Three Practical Tools for States", Ms Maze presented UNIDIR's web-based prototype for matching needs and resources. UNIDIR Deputy Director Dr Christiane Agboton Johnson spoke at the panel "Conflict of Interests: Children and Guns in Zones of Instability" organized by the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the International Action Network on Small Arms and featuring Emmanuel Jal, musician and former child soldier.

Kerstin Vignard